

BOOK REVIEW OF *LOOKING FOR ALASKA* WRITTEN BY JOHN GREEN

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ABSTRACT

Main purpose of this review is to encourage readers to read *Looking for Alaska* and to understand the motive of the protagonist of this novel. This review contains some major spoilers from this novel. *Looking for Alaska* tells about changes and experiences which encountered by the protagonist while seeking his *Great Perhaps*. The novel also conveys what it means to love and to lose someone. After reading this review, the readers could understand this novel clearly and thoroughly.

Keywords: Great Perhaps, motive

1. INTRODUCTION

The reason why I choose a young-adult novel entitled *Looking for Alaska* is because this novel is great. I considered that this novel is great because it has a very great storyline and plot. I think that the author of this novel has a talent to make the reader falls in love with everything inside this novel such as the characters, the dialogues, the jokes, etc. This young-adult novel is a story about high school boy who falls in love with a young, beautiful and mysterious girl named Alaska Young but the story of their relationship is so intriguing that make the reader want to finish reading this novel. The novel also taught the reader some slices of life which made

him/her emotionally involved. All of those are the reasons why I chose this novel to get reviewed.

2. REVIEW OF THE NOVEL

Looking for Alaska has a strong point that make this novel is appealing to read. The strong point that I want to talk about is the protagonist of this novel, Miles “Pudge” Halter. Miles Halter becomes the great source of the story development because of his motive in this novel. This is the reason why I want to review the character of Miles Halter thoroughly. Miles Halter is a dynamic character who is experiencing some changes from the beginning to the end of the novel.

There are three points I would like to point out about general descriptions of Miles Halter in this novel. The First one is the physical description of Miles Halter. Miles Halter is a sixteen-year-old boy who bears a tall, skinny and scrawny appearance. Miles Halter is so skinny that The Colonel calls him Pudge when they first met in the dorm room. It can be seen from The Colonel statement, “Pudge, the Colonel said. Because you're skinny. It's called irony, Pudge. Heard of it? Now, let's go get some cigarettes and start this year off right.” (Green, 2005, 21). When it comes to the facial feature Alaska’s statement from the novel can describe him, “You're smart like him, she said. Quieter, though. And cuter, but I didn't even just say that, because I love my boyfriend.” (Green, 2005, 29)

The second one is Miles Halter’s personalities before he becomes the student of Culver Creek Boarding School in Alabama. Miles Halter spends his first sixteen years in Florida with his parents. When in Florida, Miles enrolls in a public school

nearby. Miles Halter is a type of person who is not popular in his previous school.

It can be seen from his statement in the beginning of the novel:

“Although I was more or less forced to invite all my "school friends," i.e., the ragtag bunch of drama people and English geeks I sat with by social necessity in the cavernous cafeteria of my public school, I knew they wouldn't come” (Green, 2005, 9).

Beside his socially awkward personality, Miles Halter is a very ambitious person. It can be seen from his efforts to seek “The Great Perhaps” outside his hometown and to attend the Culver Creek Boarding School in Alabama. This is his statement from the novel to show that Miles is an ambitious person, “Francois Rabelais. He was this poet. And his last words were ‘I go to seek a Great Perhaps.’ That's why I'm going. So I don't have to wait until I die to start seeking a Great Perhaps” (Green, 2005, 11).

The third point is Miles Halter's motive in this novel. His motive is to seek “The Great Perhaps”. With that in mind he decides to enter the Culver Creek Boarding School in Alabama. When he decides to do this, his parents oppose his idea but eventually they allow him because Miles' father is also one of the alumni of the Culver Creek. Miles' other motive is to make some friends in the Culver Creek and it can be reflected from the imaginary conversation he has on his mind in his dorm room:

“I vaguely hoped that someone would come up and talk to me. I imagined the conversation:”

“Hey. Is this your first year?”

“Yeah. Yeah. I'm from Florida.”

“That's cool. So you're used to the heat.”

“I wouldn't be used to this heat if I were from Hades, I'd joke. I'd make a good first impression. Oh, he's funny. That guy Miles is a riot.”
“That didn't happen, of course. Things never happened like I imagined them” (Green, 2005, 14).

At this point I will explain why the character's motive can become the source of this novel's intriguing story. From what I gather, “The Great Perhaps” can be defined as a passion or goal in Miles Halter's life. When Miles Halter is seeking his “Great Perhaps” in Culver Creek, Miles Halter encounters some life-changing experiences which he gets from his friends. They are The Colonel, Alaska Young, Takumi and Lara Butterskaya. These friends make Miles a different person at the end of this novel. But according to my analysis, there are only The Colonel and Alaska Young who are responsible for the changes. Therefore I will only convey what kind of life-changing experiences that Miles gets from The Colonel and Alaska Young. That is why Miles Halter's motive in this novel can develop such an appealing story.

First I will convey what kind of changes The Colonel gives to Miles Halter. The Colonel is putting Miles into a situation he has never encountered before. At first, Miles is afraid to be friend with The Colonel because he is afraid of getting into some troubles. But in the end, Miles is keeping up with The Colonel's troublesome lifestyle. When it comes to troubles The Colonel gives Miles some remarkable lesson which is to never betray your companions. This is the part from the novel when The Colonel states his statement:

“Anyway, when you get in trouble, just don't tell on anyone. I mean, I hate the rich snots here with a fervent passion I usually reserve only for dental work and my father. But that doesn't mean I would rat them out. Pretty much the only important thing is never never never never rat” (Green, 2005, 25).

The Colonel introduces him to cigarette and liquor which are the things that Miles' mom warns him to stay away from. Miles has never done these kinds of things before, so these are some new things for him to experience it. I think that doing what some people think is wrong is not always bad. There are always two sides on every coin. Through smoking and drinking, Miles Halter can socialize and make new friends.

The Colonel also teaches Miles that, as teenagers, there is nothing to be afraid of because teenagers are invincible. This happens when Miles and his friends want to prank on Kevin and his friends. Miles becomes a brave man who does not hesitate on getting busted by the Eagle when he was doing his part of the prank. Here are some quotes on how The Colonel teaches Miles to be brave:

“He had printed up individual itineraries for each of us, including times exact to the second. Our watches synchronized, our clothes black, our backpacks on, our breath visible in the cold, our minds filled with the minute details of the plan, our hearts racing, we walked out of the barn together once it was completely dark, around seven. The five of us walking confidently in a row, I'd never felt cooler. The Great Perhaps was upon us, and we were invincible. The plan may have had faults, but we did not.” (Green, 2005, 126)

When The Colonel introduces Miles Halter to Alaska Young he instantly has a crush on her. From this point on I will convey what kind of changes Alaska gives to Miles. Miles enjoys Alaska's company. He finds that Alaska is unprejudiced and intelligent girl. Alaska gives Miles different points of view on many things. For instance when Alaska got busted by The Eagle because of

smoking in a school area with Miles. Rather than feeling afraid or feeling ashamed, Alaska faces it differently. The following is their dialogue:

“He loves me, He loves all y'all, too. He just loves the school more. That's the thing. He thinks busting us is good for the school and good for us. It's the eternal struggle, Pudge. The Good versus the Naughty.”

“You're awfully philosophical for a girl that just got busted”

“Sometimes you lose a battle. But mischief always wins the war” (Green, 2005, 71).

At the same time Miles also sees Alaska as a very difficult girl to understand. Once, Alaska tells Miles about one of her complex thought about “The Labyrinth”. She gets this term from Simon Bolivar’s last words, those last words are: “how will I ever get out of this labyrinth?” Alaska is inspired by these words. Below is the quotation of their dialogues discussing about “The Labyrinth”:

“...So what's the labyrinth?” (Green, 2005, 27)

“...That's the mystery, isn't it? Is the labyrinth living or dying? Which is he trying to escape—the world or the end of it?” (Green, 2005, 28)

In my opinion this “Labyrinth” term is referring to life as it is. Those last words are expression of a man who suffers for a very long time. Despite Alaska’s complex mind, Miles is still enjoying her company but until the very end of the novel Miles still unable to understand Alaska.

Miles never expects that Alaska’s death could affect him so much. He conveys his hatred and disappointment for Alaska’s death in these quotations below:

“I lit a cigarette and spit into the creek. ‘You can't just make me different and then leave’ I said out loud to her. Because I was fine before, Alaska. I was fine with just me and last words and school friends, and you can't just make me different and then die. For she had embodied the Great Perhaps—

she had proved to me that it was worth it to leave behind my minor life for grander maybes, and now she was gone and with her my faith in perhaps....”

“....I could try to pretend that I didn't care anymore, but it could never be true again. You can't just make yourself matter and then die, Alaska, because now I am irretrievably different, and I'm sorry I let you go, yes, but you made the choice. You left me Perhapsless, stuck in your goddamned labyrinth. And now I don't even know if you chose the straight and fast way out, if you left me like this on purpose. And so I never knew you, did I? I can't remember, because I never knew.”

“...I needed, I decided, to really know her, because I needed more to remember. Before I could begin the shameful process of forgetting the how and the why of her living and dying, I needed to learn it: *How. Why. When. Where. What.*” (Green, 2005, 206).

Miles' disappointment and hatred can be seen from the quotations above.

He feels that Alaska did not give much for him to remember after she died. He also hates how Alaska makes him a different person and then just leaves him forever. On the bright side, Alaska's death gives Miles some enlightenments in his journey of seeking “The Great Perhaps.” Miles finally realizes that his "Great Perhaps" was manifested in Alaska Young.

Miles Halter finally puts his thought about Alaska in his final essay. The reason Miles puts his thought in the final essay is because Dr. Hyde makes the question somewhat similar to Alaska's question about “The Labyrinth”. The question is, “How will you ever get out of this labyrinth of suffering?” Below is some parts from the essay:

“But ultimately I do not believe that she was only matter. The rest of her must be recycled, too. I believe now that we are greater than the sum of our parts. If you take Alaska's genetic code and you add her life experiences and the relationships she had with people, and then you take the size and shape of her body, you do not get her. There is something else entirely. There is a part of her greater than the sum of her knowable parts. And that part has to go somewhere, because it cannot be destroyed.” (Green, 2005, 261-262).

From the quotations above it can be seen that Miles finally can let go of Alaska because he believes that some parts of Alaska still prevail in his world. He also thinks that he is not the only one who could not understand Alaska.

Another quotation from the final essay below is Miles' thought on seeking "The Great Perhaps" in Culver Creek:

"Before I got here, I thought for a long time that the way out of the labyrinth was to pretend that it did not exist, to build a small, self-sufficient world in a back corner of the endless maze and to pretend that I was not lost, but home. But that only led to a lonely life accompanied only by the last words of the already-dead, so I came here looking for a Great Perhaps, for real friends and a more-than-minor life. And then I screwed up and the Colonel screwed up and Takumi screwed up and she slipped through our fingers. And there's no sugarcoating it: She deserved better friends."

"When she fucked up, all those years ago, just a little girl terrified into paralysis, she collapsed into the enigma of herself. And I could have done that, but I saw where it led for her. So I still believe in the Great Perhaps, and I can believe in it in spite of having lost her." (Green, 2005, 260)

From the quotation above, it can be seen that Miles has already found his "Great Perhaps" in Culver Creek. He finally experiences teenagers-life as never before. He makes some real friends in Culver Creek who accompany him through good times and bad times. At first he thought that without Alaska he could not complete his seeking of "The Great Perhaps" completely. But eventually Miles understands that his "Great Perhaps" is not going to disappear just because of Alaska's death.

After reading and reviewing the character of Miles Halter, I would like to say that he shows me two meaningful things about life. First is "The Great Perhaps", "The Great Perhaps" can be visualized into a passion or a goal in our life. It is that

in this life we should find our own passions and goals. It can be found in any place and at any time as long as we never stop seeking. The second one is “The Labyrinth”, in my opinion, “The Labyrinth” is a place or a situation where there is no exit or no way out. I see the connection between these two major terms in this novel. It is that in order to get out from “The Labyrinth” of life we should find ourselves a “Great Perhaps”.

3. CONCLUSION

To conclude this review, I would like to strongly recommend all the readers to read *Looking for Alaska*. This novel gives me advice on how to get through the upsides and downsides of life. Miles Halter’s process of searching “The Great Perhaps” in this novel is the reason why I can express those kinds of statements above. There are two messages which I can grasp from Miles Halter's motive.

The first message is Miles Halter’s passion, passion is important key to success. Because if we do not have any passion we will not be able to know what we really want to do in this world. Without passion we will end up having a job that we hate. Miles' passion of looking “The Great Perhaps” in this novel can be applied in the real world.

The second one is Miles Halter’s will to change. As I explained in the review section before, Miles becomes a different person after he meets several friends in Culver Creek. Sometimes people are afraid of changes, they tend to stay in their comfort zone. Miles Halter can overcome his fears of getting out of the comfort

zone. Through this novel, Miles taught us that it is necessary to step out from the comfort zone in order to get our goals in this life.

Looking for Alaska is one of the greatest novels which could show the soon-to-be readers how to bear some difficulties in their life. Aside from the decent messages that the reader can get from this novel, the content of this novel has some explicit sexual materials, and alcohol use. Thus, the readers should be at least seventeen years old and keep an open mind when reading *Looking for Alaska*.

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